Indian workers in Mississippi Shipyard

2723. SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI:
SHRI AMAR SINGH:

Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that 120 Indian workers have recently quit their jobs at a Mississippi Shipyard in USA protesting alleged slave treatment by their employer after being tricked into coming to the US;

(b) whether these workers have demanded a probe into the matter as the firm even faced similar accusations last year and if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if so, Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) and (b) As per the reports received from the Indian Mission in USA, 590 Indian workers were recruited and deployed in the yard of M/s Signal International, a marine fabrication company, located at Mississippi and Texas. They had gone to US on H2B visas (Guest Workers Visa Programme) valid initially for 10 months, extendable at the discretion of the employer and the US authorities. The workers were aggrieved on account of alleged poor accommodation and amenities, deductions from their salary from accommodation, food, electricity, water and also non-fulfilment of alleged initial commitment of permanent residency status.

120 workers met the Indian Ambassador in Washington on 27th March, 2008 highlighting their demands of expediting investigation into their grievances, prevent their deportation from USA, arrange permanent residence status and prevent harassment to their families in India by the recruiter.

In March, 2007, after the issue involving the grievances of the workers appeared in local media, the Indian Consulate General in Houston, took up the matter with M/s Signal International and pursuant to their efforts, the company agreed to increase the wages from $ 18.00 to $ 19.15 per hour and enhance their living conditions.

(c) The Indian Mission in USA has approached the US Government to conduct a detailed investigation on the complaints of Indian workers and take remedial measures. The Indian Mission has also taken steps to withhold visas from the main US recruiters involved to prevent them from entering India to conduet recruiting operations. The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has suspended the license of M/s Dewan Consultants and M/s S. Mansur & Co., Mumbai, black listed the foreign employer and is also initiating legal action against the Recruiting Agent for violation of Emigration Act, 1983.

Unclaimed funds of NRKs

2724. SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there are unclaimed funds of Non Resident Keialities (NRKs) including those of overseas left with the Central Government;

(b) if so, the details of such fund of overseas Keralities and those residing in other States for the last three years, year-wise and category-wise;

(c) if so, whether steps would be taken to utilize above fund for the welfare of NRKs;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) to (e) Prior to the introduction of the Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana (PBBY) on 25.12.2003, emigrant workers recruited directly by the foreign employers were required to make a compulsory security deposit equivalent to one way return airfare while seeking emigration clearance. The purpose was to meet the cost of repatriation of the emigrant worker if required. The emigrant workers could claim the security on his/her return to India. As per information available in this Ministry an amount of around Rs. 28 crore is held as security deposit in the Government account and the refund of deposits are being made as and when claims are filed, from time to time. These funds will continue to be held as security deposit and refunded to the relevant workers upon claims filed.

Independent of this the Ministry has proposed creation of an Overseas Workers Welfare Fund for meeting various on site, off site and other welfare needs of the emigrants and the returnees.

Minimum wage to Indian workers

2725. SHRI T.T.V. DHINAKARAN: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is proposed to take up the matter with the Arabian and other Asian countries to provide a minimum wage to Indian worker;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) to (c) The Government has prescribed minimum wages only for women household service workers emigrating to the Emigration Check Required (ECR) countries. The minimum wage will be fixed by the Indian Missions concerned in the range of US $ 300-350 after taking into account the prevailing market wage in that country. It is intended to serve as a benchmark for the Indian Missions for attesting work contracts and for the Protectors of Emigrants before granting emigration clearance. This has been done for the women household service workers because they are not covered by the labour laws in the country of employment. As regards the monthly wage of other overeseas workers it is a matter between the employer and the worker as set out in the employment contract arrived at by mutual agreement based on market conditions. Therefore, the Government has not prescribed a minimum wage for other sectors.

Work visa for workers in Kuwait

2726. SHRI PR. RAJAN: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Kuwait has stopped issuing work visas for Indians at any time;

(b) if so, the steps Government has taken to protect NRIs in Kuwait; and

(c) the details thereof?